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How Long is the Road to Freedom?

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"The Russian intervention provoked the indignation of the entire world . . . I trust I am right in saying: It has hardly ever happened in the history of the world that a nation's fight for freedom excited greater sympathy than ours. We fought by ourselves, cut off from the world."

Lajos Kossuth, Regent of Hungary, 1849

"In harsh or melancholy epochs free men may always take comfort from the grand lesson of history, that tyrannies cannot last except among servile races. The years which seem endless to those who endure them are but a flick of mischance in the journey."

Sir Winston Churchill, 1956

In October 1956 history repeated itself.

Hungarian people fled in terror to Austria.

Now Austria is a small country and struggling to maintain itself, yet it opened up its border and thousands of Hungarians struggled into the country. It is well to remember that Austria single-handed, almost without help, cared for the refugees during the first terrible weeks. Help was desperately needed, and in early November the Austrian Government appealed to the League of Red Cross Societies.

All Red Cross Societies have the purpose "Mitigation of suffering throughout the world." The League of Red Cross Societies, which is the central headquarters in Geneva of all National Red Cross Societies, took up the appeal immediately. On November 7th, the League agreed to meet the basic needs of the refugees, and a formal contract was drawn up between the Austrian Government, the League, and the United Nations High Commisioner for Refugees. A month later, as refugees continued to come across the border in large numbers at night, the League called upon its members, the national Red

Miss Ina Broadfoot C.57

Miss Ina Broadfoot who is Director of Red Cross Nursing Services for Manitoba recently returned from service with the League of Red Cross Societies in Vienna. While overseas she attended the International Congress of Nursing in Rome. Miss Broadfoot has travelled extensively in Canada as well as other countries. She was one of the first women to Traverse the Alcan Highway by automobile, and travel through the North-west Territories by vehicle, boat and canoe.

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Cross Societies, to help in taking care of the refugees. Within two weeks, eleven countries had undertaken to send fourteen teams of welfare workers. Almost overnight the Canadian Red Cross Society made up a team of six persons, and they were on their way by air to Austria.

During the month of January the population of the twenty-four league camps throughout Austria rose steadily from a daily average of 21,000 to one of 29,000. Add to this number another thousand of transient refugees wandering in and out of League camps during that time. Official figures state, 16,000 men, 9,000 women, and 4,000 children under fifteen years of age. One camp had 4,259 refugees—a city for Manitoba. And one could see national Red Cross Societies from twelve countries at work carrying out the aim of Red Cross in "Mitigation of Suffering."

By May, the League was administering (responsible for food, clothing, welfare and medical care) forty-one camps with a population of almost 50,000 refugees.

During the six months' period the Canadian Red Cross Society helped by sending three teams to Austria, three people in key positions with the League's vast headquarters in Vienna, a team of four nurses and a leader in Holland. Holland had provided accomodation for refugees waiting to come to Canada, and Canadian Red Cross nurses looked after the Hungarians, in various centres in Holland.

Now how did this work out in a practical way?

On January 1st, our Canadian Red Cross team moved into Brigittaspital —once a maternity hospital in the heart of Vienna. The building from the outside looked like a fine place. but when one got nearer there seemed to be some broken windows, and it did not appear to be a spic and span hospital. When we entered the building it was a different matter. The radiators were cold—no steam connection. The elevators didn't work, sanitary conditions were very poor, and the place was dilapidated. We were told that the Russians had taken over the building during their occupation of that particular section of Vienna. We found five hundred Hungarians; as many as thirty-six people in some "wards," all sleeping on sacks filled with straw, and two blankets. Small stoves gave out feeble heat; the taps had only cold water, and it was cold in the long corridors. But the Hungarians were cheerful. They knew the Red Cross symbol, and the Canadian Red Cross was but another part of the Hungarian Red Cross which had functioned in their own country. We tried to get down to work at once. The League of the Red Cross Societies had undertaken to provide food, clothing, medical care and recreational services to the refugees, and that was our job in Camp Brigittaspital. The language barrier seemed insurmountable. There the Hungarians came to our rescue. Several wonderful people volunteered to help, and we owe a great debt to these interpreters. They spoke German, English and some French, and they were of inestimable value to us.

The medical-nursing unit had patients at once. My first patient had a headache—rather a natural complaint under the circustances. An Austrian doctor who practised in the district was already in charge of the medical department, and a kinder, more patient man I have never seen.

The clothing room was filled with second-hand clothing, and the job of sorting all this, getting shelves built, and getting everything into shape was a great problem, a slow, frustrating process; but gradually, with exas-

perating slowness, order was achieved and the "Stores" was a wonderful sight by the end of February, especially when brand new clothing (some from the Canadian Red Cross) was piled on the shelves. The central League warehouse was crowded with fourteen hundred tons of clothing available for distribution.

The welfare recreation department was very important. Programme development was the order of the day. There were five hundred people herded in a building, with no privacy, no books to read, no music (and the Hungarians love music—it is a part of their normal life), just sitting around wondering "What is going to happen to us? Where are we going?" So it was a great day when a piano arrived at camp. Then dances were arranged after the League supplied us with a record player. In about two weeks after taking over the camp there was a classroom in operation. Hungarian teachers were recruited and the boys and girls (youngsters, the majority about eight to ten) were busy at lessons. One bright, English-speaking Hungarian taught English, and one would meet the children in the corridors and their precise greeting would be "Good Morning. My name is Laszlo." A refugee well trained in physical education taught the boys gymnastics. The boys could "tumble" very well. It seemed easier to get the children busy at school than to arrange adult classes, although soon there was a class in Spanish—as some of the refugees were planning to go to South America. Then sewing machines and washing machines were obtained through League funds, and the women were very busy. A new dress helps morale wonderfully. We got a carpenter busy making shelves for the clothing room, and bookcases for a small library. A shoemaker had a shop, and he worked long hours patching up shoes. The washing machines went all day long. All our refugees kept themselves so clean and neat. The irons and ironing boards were never idle. A ping pong table was provided, and this helped the boys of sixteen, seventeen and eighteen while away the empty hours. Programme development was perhaps the most important item of camp life. So gradually most of the Hungarians were able to occupy themselves in some way.

The general health of our camp was very good. For the first three months our people did not move from camp, and by trying to work out a public health programme, particularly with the children, we were able to keep good tab on the people. Sanitary conditions were poor. There was an insufficient number of toilets and washrooms; showers and bathtubs in our camp did not exist. I think the Hungarians must be naturally healthy people; else how was it possible for five hundred people to live under fairly poor conditions, crowding together, and to be as healthy as they were. The League official report for all camps for the month of January, for example, says "The health of the refugees remains good—very good." In the first six months I was in camp there were only three cases of tuberculosis requiring Sanatorium care, and the despatch with which these patients were removed from camp was remarkable.

For our supplies, it is estimated that there were one hundred and fifty tons of medicine stored in the central warehouse. The supplies at League warehouses came from all over the world, contributions from sixty national Red Cross Societies.

I suppose there had been a fine kitchen at the hospital, but you could

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not find a vestige of evidence when we moved in. Food was being brought into camp from a catering firm in large cans every day. Almost immediately plans were made to build a kitchen—not from the old bricks and rubble, but a new kitchen—not gleaming in stainless steel and indirect lighting, but a satisfactory place in which Hungarian food could be cooked. Then some more walls were reconstructed and a dining room was fashioned. By February our first cafeteria meal was served on G.I. feeding trays, and one hundred and fifty could be seated at one time. We take so many things for granted that it is hard to realize what it meant to the Hungarians to have food (their type of food) served reasonably well, and to have a dining room, crowded of course, but a little more comfortable than before. Another step on the road to freedom.

On January first five hundred people were sleeping on straw sacks on tile floors. We got in touch with that magic department, Red Cross League Headquarters, and soon (I believe it was the next afternoon) trucks drew up with cots and mattresses on them. Volunteers flocked to the scene and soon many people could boast a half decent place on which to sleep. By mid April our member, the clothing expert, had wrangled sheets and pillow cases.

As the people settled in at camp (and some of them, I think, got to feel that "Brigitta" was a sort of home), they became very anxious to help us in many ways. Our team leader, Mr. D. H. Young, Assistant Commissioner of the Saskatchewan Red Cross Society, suggested that they form a "Hungarian Council" made up of representatives from each floor and from the larger rooms, the Austrian Government representative, and the Canadian Red Cross. They were set to look at general camp problems and to suggest changes or solutions. I think unconsciously we were trying to educate them into democratic ways.

By the end of June there were still between ten and fifteen thousand refugees in about fifteen camps. The League of the Red Cross Societies had completed its formal contract with the Austrian Government and handed over the responsibility of caring for the Hungarian refugees to the Austrian Red Cross on June 30th. The League will still give necessary funds and supplies to help the Austrian Red Cross, not a very big organization and not a very rich one, but ready to take on the added responsibility of "humanitarian aid, in time of peace or war." Red Cross personnel from different countries will stay until September 30th, and four Canadians will be carrying on in Brigittaspital.

How long is the road to freedom!

I believe it is up to us to make that road as short as possible. We in Manitoba who have never known how it feels to flee, in terror, from a beloved country, we who have never known what it feels like to live cooped up with hundreds of others, nothing much to do—wondering, everlastingly wondering with sharpened anxiety, What happens now? Where can I go? What country will take me?" —we have a responsibility to rehabilitate all refugees, and above all to have patience, kindly patience, with them as they try to settle down to a different life in a foreign country.

A little boy in church saw the choir entering all in white. He whispered to his father "Look! They're all going to get a haircut!"